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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 05/29/07
Part-1

Index:

- 1) Top headlines
- 2) Editorials
- 3) Prime Minister's daily schedule
- 4) Troubled by political funds scandals, Agricultural Minister Matsuoka commits suicide
- 5) Matsuoka left behind eight suicide notes and an apology; Prime Minister Abe, as the one who appointed him, feels weight of responsibility
- 6) Interim farm minister will be Wakabayashi until Abe makes new appointment later this week
- 7) Abe: No investigation will be made regarding allegations of Matsuoka's political funds improprieties
- 8) Death of Matsuoka could stall WTO farm talks
- 9) Despite Matsuoka's demise, opposition camp will not let up pressure on Abe administration on "money and politics" issue
- 10) Opposition to file no-confidence motion against Health and Labor Minister Yanagisawa over social insurance fiasco (2 reports)

Articles:

1) TOP HEADLINES

Asahi, Mainichi, Yomiuri, Nihon Keizai, Sankei, Tokyo Shimbun & Akahata:
Farm Minister Matsuoka commits suicide, dealing blow to Abe administration

2) EDITORIALS

Asahi:

- (1)Matsuoka kills himself without clearing his suspicions
- (2)The "Asashoryu-Hakuho age" in sumo: Two Mongolian yokozuna

Mainichi:

- (1)Farm minister's suicide: Abe administration in a serious situation
- (2)Fast-breeder reactor Monju: Safety must be confirmed thoroughly

Yomiuri:

- (1)Agricultural Minister Matsuoka's suicide: Politics needs to restore public confidence to prevent future tragic deaths
- (2)Loss of pensions: Negative legacy from lax organization

Nihon Keizai:

- (1)The politics-and-money problem should not be left unresolved with Agriculture Minister Matsuoka's death
- (2)The public needs to have a client's viewpoint in considering relief measures for those unable to receive pensions

Sankei:

- (1)Farm Minister Matsuoka's suicide: Do not put a lid on the politics-and-money issue

TOKYO 00002370 002 OF 006

- (2)ANA trouble: Crisis management needed in computer system

Tokyo Shimbun:

- (1)Farm Minister Matsuoka's suicide: How does the prime minister who was protective of him feel?
- (2)No need for a hurried vote on reform bill for Social Insurance Agency

Akahata:

Farm Minister Matsuoka's suicide: Investigation must be continued

3) Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei)

Prime Minister's schedule, May 28

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
May 29, 2007

08:54:

Met at Kantei with Administrative Reform Minister Watanabe, followed by METI Minister Amari, Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association Chairman Fujio Cho, and Petroleum Association of Japan Chairman Fumiaki Watari.

09:36:

Attended an Education Rebuilding Council meeting.

10:34:

Met Deputy Vice Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Kamimura, followed by Deputy Vice Environment Minister Tanitsu, Foreign Ministry International Cooperation Bureau Director General Bessho. Afterward met Deputy Foreign Minister Kono.

11:06:

Met Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Matoba, followed by Resources and Energy Agency Director General Mochizuki, MOFA Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau chief Sasae.

12:23:

Attended a memorial service for the war dead at Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery.

12:53:

Met Matoba at the Kantei.

13:38:

Met Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki. Afterward held a labor press

conference with Rengo President Takagi in the presence of Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Yanagisawa.

14:25:

Met Yanagisawa.

14:57:

Offered his condolences for the death of MAFF Minister Matsuoka at Keio University Hospital in Shinanomachi.

15:35:

Met at the Kantei with Science and Technology Minister Takaichi and Assistant Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Saka. Takaichi stayed on.

17:03:

Attended an LDP executive meeting in the Diet building.

18:05:

Attended a Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy meeting at the Kantei.

19:20:

Returned to his official residence.

19:45:

Attended a temporary wake for MAFF Minister Matsuoka in Shinjuku Ward.

TOKYO 00002370 003 OF 006

20:15:

Returned to his official residence.

4) MAFF Minister Matsuoka commits suicide, possibly over political funds scandal, shocking Abe administration

NIHON KEIZAI (Top play) (Full)

Eve., May 28, 2007

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Toshikatsu Matsuoka, 62, was found hanged at a residence complex for lawmakers in Akasaka, Tokyo, at around 0:18 p.m. yesterday by his secretary. The minister was taken to a hospital but pronounced dead at 2 p.m. The Metropolitan Police Department is conducting an investigation, believing that Matsuoka committed suicide. Matsuoka had faced strong criticism from opposition parties over the dubious use of office expenses and donations and calls were growing for his resignation from the post. He became the first incumbent cabinet minister to commit suicide in the postwar period.

According to investigators, Matsuoka met with his secretary until around 10:00 a.m. yesterday in his room on the 11th floor of the Diet members' apartment complex. Matsuoka later failed to show up. As a result, his secretary and a security police officer entered his apartment and found the minister hanging by a rope made of fabric attached to a living room door in the apartment.

There was no suicide note next to the body, according to the secretary. Immediately after Matsuoka became farm minister, it came

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to light that his fund management organization housed in the charge-free Dietmembers' Office Building had declared huge amounts of money as office expenses. Matsuoka repeatedly explained, "The office has not declared any fictitious expenses." Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also defended Matsuoka.

In May, rumors about his possible involvement in a bid-rigging scandal involving the Japan Green Resources Agency began to spread. Opposition parties grilled Matsuoka severely, saying his explanations were insufficient. Calls for his resignation were growing from even within the ruling coalition.

5) Agriculture Minister Matsuoka dead; 8 farewell notes left behind; Prime Minister Abe says, "I feel responsible for appointing him as cabinet minister"

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Top Play) (Lead paragraph)

May 29, 2007

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Toshikatsu Matsuoka was pronounced dead at 2:00 p.m. yesterday at Keio University Hospital in Shinjuku Ward. Matsuoka committed suicide by hanging himself with a rope at his lodging in the 11th floor of the House of

Representative members' compound. He died from suffocation. Since he left farewell notes in his lodging, Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department's Akasaka Police has determined that he had committed suicide. Police are now investigating the motive for his suicide. This was the first time for an incumbent cabinet minister to commit suicide since War Minister Korechika Anami committed ritual suicide (seppuku) immediately after the end of World War II. Since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had backed Matsuoka, who had been under severe pressure over a "politics and money scandal" his death could deal a

TOKYO 00002370 004 OF 006

significant blow to the Abe administration.

6) Environment Minister Wakabayashi appointed acting farm minister

SANKEI (Page 1) (Full)
May 29, 2007

Chie Cabinet Secretary Yasuhisa Shiozaki announced at a press conference last evening that Environment Minister Masatoshi Wakabayashi was appointed acting minister of agriculture, forestry and fisheries for Toshikatsu Matsuoka, who committed suicide.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe revealed yesterday that he would appoint a formal replacement later, saying, "A political vacuum must be avoided in dealing with agricultural, forestry and fisheries issues. I want to pick a competent successor, placing an acting minister for the time being."

He then added: "I would like to pick the successor in consideration of the schedule for an imperial attestation ceremony." He indicated that he would formally appoint Matsuoka's replacement after the Emperor, who is now traveling abroad, returns home.

7) Prime Minister Abe: Farm minister not investigated over Japan Green Resources Agency bid-rigging scandal

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 1) (Full)
May 29, 2007

When asked by reporters about the allegation that Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Toshikatsu Matsuoka had received donations from corporations linked with the Japan Green Resources Agency, a semi-governmental body affiliated with the farm ministry, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe responded last evening:

"I will speak to clear his name: my understanding is that investigative authorities stated they were not investigating Agriculture Minister Matsuoka over the Japan Green Resources Agency scandal nor had they any plan to do so."

Abe appears to have made the above remarks in order to dispel the observation that the cause of his suicide had something to do with the police investigation. It is unusual for a prime minister to introduce the remarks by investigative authorities regarding a case under investigation.

8) Agriculture Minister Matsuoka's suicide leaves concerns about stagnation of farm policy

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 5) (Full)
May 29, 2007

The government appointed Environment Minister Masatoshi Wakabayashi as acting farm minister after Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister (MAFF) Matsuoka committed suicide on May 28. But many observers have voiced concern about a possible stagnation in agricultural administration. There are a host of tasks left for the government to address, such as agricultural talks under the World Trade Organization (WTO) and negotiations on an economic partnership agreement (EPA) with the European Union (EU). Matsuoka was under heavy pressure over questionable office expenses and other scandals

TOKYO 00002370 005 OF 006

over the past several months.

There are many challenges Matsuoka left behind. Although economic circles are calling for EPAs with the United States and the EU, Japan remains unable to even launch negotiations on specifics with them, falling behind South Korea. WTO farm talks are set to restart in full swing, but the Japanese government is still trying to keep high tariffs and refusing to open its market. As it stands, prospects are nowhere in sight. The US and European countries reportedly have begun to take moves to enter negotiations behind closed doors while ignoring Japan.

The government hopes to see an agreement reached in the WTO agricultural talks by the end of this year. Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Akira Amari said: "Mr. Matsuoka was an important partner for me in WTO talks. He was a very competent farm minister." Meanwhile, it is also true that Matsuoka, as a lawmaker lobbying for the interests of domestic agriculture-related organizations, had enormous clout over them. A MAFF official said: "He would probably have been able to persuade party members and agricultural groups even if WTO farm talks had ended unfavorably to Japan."

Acting Farm Minister Wakabayashi said in the Environment Ministry last night: "I will do my best to enact the bills which Mr. Matsuoka was making efforts to enact in the current Diet session." He thus indicated his determination to make utmost efforts to get MAFF-related legislation through the Diet.

9) Opposition parties determined to continue pursuing Abe

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Excerpts)
May 29, 2007

Opposition parties plan to continue pursuing the Abe cabinet over the question of politics and money. They are especially determined to focus on Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's responsibility for defending Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries Minister Toshikatsu Matsuoka (who committed suicide yesterday).

Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama, meeting the press yesterday, indicated his party's plan to expedite efforts to uncover facts about the office expense scandal, saying: "Creating a clean environment as soon as possible is our mission." The party's Diet affairs chief also said: "The prime minister did not discharge (Matsuoka) from the post despite the allegations, and that was wrong."

Japanese Communist Party Head of the Secretariat Tadayoshi Ichida noted, "The prime minister continued to defend farm minister Matsuoka." Social Democratic Party head Mizuho Fukushima also referred to the prime minister's responsibility, saying, "The prime minister is to blame for driving (MAFF Minister Matsuoka) to that extent."

10)-1 Battle over bills related to reform of SIA: Opposition ready to introduce no-confidence motion against MHLW minister

SANKEI (Page 5) (Excerpts)
May 28, 2009

TOKYO 00002370 006 OF 006

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) intends to introduce a no-confidence motion against Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) Minister Hakuo Yanagisawa over the missing pension premium payment record. The DPJ, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the People's New Party (PNP) will today hold meetings of their secretaries general and Diet Policy Committee chairmen to look into the issue, including the possible submission of a resolution seeking the dismissal of Lower House Health, Labor and Welfare Committee Chairman Yoshitaka Sakurada. The ruling parties aim at clearing a set of bills related to reform of the Social Insurance Agency (SIA) through the Lower House on May 29. The battle between the ruling and opposition blocs will likely heat up.

Appearing on an NHK-TV talk show, DPJ Policy Research Council Chairman Takeaki Matsumoto on May 27 criticized the ruling bloc for adopting the set of bills related to reform of the SIA at the Lower House Health, Labor and Welfare Committee. He said, "The adoption of the bills is nothing but an action to cover up the issue of the missing pension premium payment records." Japanese Communist Party Policy Committee Chairman Akira Koike and SDP Policy Research Committee Council Chairperson Tomoko Abe indicated a stance of submitting a no-confidence motion. Matsumoto responded to their proposal, noting, "Opposition parties will confer on the issue and raise issues in a thoroughgoing manner." DPJ Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama on May 26 also indicated a positive stance toward the idea of introducing a no-confidence motion.

10)-2 DPJ, SDP, PNP agree to submit no-confidence motion against MHLW minister

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 1) (Full)
Evening, May 28, 2007

The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto), the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the People's New Party (PNP) on the morning of May 28 held a meeting of their secretaries general in the Diet building. Participants agreed to introduce a no-confidence motion against Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) Minister Hakuo Yanagisawa, over the "disappearing pension contributions" issue, which could reduce public pension payouts due to mistakes made by the Social Insurance Agency (SIA). They also agreed to submit a resolution seeking the dismissal of Yoshitaka Sakurada, chairman of the Lower House Health Labor and Welfare Committee, for his handling of a set of bills related to reform of the SIA, which were adopted at the Committee last week.

Emerging from the meeting, DPJ Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama played up to reporters, "We cannot possibly allow the Lower House Health, Labor and Welfare Committee to railroad the bills, turning a blind eye to the people's greatest matter of concern."

The three secretaries general also agreed to continue to pursue the government's responsibility for the pension fiasco and shared the view that the contents of relief measures proposed by the government and the ruling parties would not convince the public.

The three parties will ask Lower House Speaker Yohei Kono on May 29 not to hold a Lower House plenary session for the adoption of those bills.

SCHIEFFER